ABSTRACT

PAPER TITLE: The British Government and the depositions of Shaikh Saqr of Sharjah in 1965 and Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi in 1966

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ABSTRACT:

It remains an important challenge for the modern Gulf states to come to terms with their own past and the experience of British imperialism. In this context, a profound understanding of the Gulf in the 1960s is of paramount importance, because it was during this decade that the area witnessed important processes of transition which continue to define life in the Gulf today. Examples for these transitions were the discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the British Government’s decision to withdraw - both militarily and politically - from the Gulf, and the beginnings of the federation process between today’s United Arab Emirates.

This paper argues that even though the 1960s were the last decade during which the British informal empire in the Gulf was still intact, it would be wrong to suppose that Great Britain’s policy in the area during that period was defined by decline and eventual withdrawal. On the contrary, the British involvement in both the external and internal affairs of the Gulf shaikhdoms was at its peak during the 1960s. Examples for the British Government’s determination to protect its economic and strategic interests in the area - if necessary against the will of the local rulers - were the depositions of Shaikh Saqr of Sharjah in May 1965 and Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi in August 1966. There were remarkable resemblances between the two depositions: both rulers stood in the way of important British policies in the Gulf area, they were both replaced by a member of their own family, and in both cases the British Government claimed to have had no hand in the event. Analyzing the role that the British Government played in Shaikh Saqr’s and Shaikh Shakhbut’s replacement, this paper explains the logic and the methods of British imperialism in the Gulf during the last years of its existence.